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top story

Chehalis Foundation Starts Push for New Penny Playground at Rec Park

FUNDRAISER: Saturday Event Generates \$70,000 for Playground

By Alex Brown / abrown@chronline.com 3 hrs ago



Penny Playground is located at 221 SW 13th Street in Chehalis.

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The Chehalis Foundation is making a rebuilt Penny Playground the focus of its latest fundraising drive.

The current playground, a 25-year-old wooden structure, is rotting, said Tim Sayler, president of the Chehalis Foundation.

"[It's] past its useful life, and it needs replacing," he said.

The project is part of the foundation's ongoing efforts at Recreation Park. It's currently in the midst of a \$400,000 renovation of the fast-pitch softball fields at the park. In 2014, it marked the opening of the \$2.7 million Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatic Center.

"It's just morphed along," Sayler said. "It's hard to separate one project from the next. We've kind of taken it in pieces."

The playground project will cost at least half a million dollars, but the foundation made some headway toward that goal with a fundraising dinner Saturday at the Jester Auto Museum & Event Center. Donors contributed more than \$70,000, and Sayler is confident money will keep rolling in as plans for the new playground start to materialize.

"[Penny Playground] is one of our community jewels," said Lily Wall, recreation manager for the city of Chehalis. "It's just so well loved. But it's a wooden structure, and it was designed to last 20 years."

Wall estimated the project will cost \$800,000 to \$1 million, a far cry from the \$100,000 cost of the original playground. But the city and the foundation want to have a facility that matches the ambition of the original and the "heart and soul" that was put into its construction.

"When we replace this, we want it to be as spectacular as what they did," Wall said.

The city is collaborating with the Chehalis Foundation on planning the project, and it's seeking grants to help get it built. The fundraising, planning and grant cycle will take at least a year.

The foundation hopes to build a playground with interactive toys, and a facility that's brightly lit and open. It's also aiming to make the equipment compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which will make the project much more expensive but allow kids with physical challenges to play safely.

Sayler said the Chehalis Foundation has no plans to change the name of Penny Playground; it earned the moniker from a 1992 penny drive that local children participated in to help fund the structure.

Connie Small, who helped spearhead that effort, went on to be a board member with the foundation. Small passed away in 2014, and Sayler said the playground project is a continuation of her legacy.

"There's no plans to change the name," he said. "It'll be the new Penny Playground. ... It was near and dear to the folks involved, and we hope to honor that effort."

In homage to the origins of the original Penny Playground, fundraising efforts for the new facility will include local schools as well.

"That creates pride and ownership for the children," Wall said.